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May 6, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

DIA review
completed.

SUBJECT: Defense Attache Talks with French Newsmen

Attached is a verbatim text of a message I received on May 5 from Major General Vernon Walters which recounts a discussion reported to him by a freelance French newspaperman. The discussion took place on May 4 and included a newspaperman, Xuan Thuy and Le Duc Tho both of the North Vietnamese Delegation in Paris, the latter of whom has just returned from Hanoi. It is a very interesting account which I am providing in its entirety for your review. The main points in the report indicate that:

- There are considerable economic problems in North Vietnam and an attitude of war weariness has developed.
- There is a split between the North Vietnamese regime which has pitted hard line faction against a pragmatic faction. North Vietnamese forces operating in South Vietnam have become alienated from the population.
- U. S. tactics have become increasingly costly. B-52 operations and anti-cadre or anti-infrastructure operations were specifically highlighted. An effort will be made to characterize you as a hawk on the war issue.
- The North Vietnamese consider that the split between Communist China and the Soviet Union is real.
- The North Vietnamese contemplate a possible takeover of Laos should the situation in Vietnam become aggravated.
- There is a sharp split between Mai Van Bo and Xuan Thuy, members of Hanoi's Paris ~~negot~~ negotiating team.

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Below is the verbatim text of a cable received on May 5 from Major General Vernon Walters:

"Pierre Darcourt, French freelance newspaperman who has previously furnished information on Vietnam visited my office today. On evening 4 May Darcourt was invited to home of head of Hanoi Medical Committee in France who is married to French woman and whom Darcourt has known for many years. This man, despite his job, is not a Communist. The occasion was a dinner given by this man. Dinner was attended by Xuan Thuy of NVN Delegation to Paris, and after dinner, about 2130, Le Duc Tho came in and remained until late. Darcourt left around midnight and came back after 2:30 a. m. when he compared notes with host on what had been said. Darcourt states that he does not normally let on that he speaks Vietnamese and reading from his notes he gave me the following information which he acquired during evening:

"The situation in Hanoi as seen by Le Duc Tho who has just returned: The economic situation is difficult. The people have relaxed following the bombing although this relaxation was not immediate. There are considerable difficulties for the distribution of food and both black market and barter are widespread with one figure of sixty percent of economic activities being conducted outside economic circuit. There is considerable war weariness in the population and fear of resumption of bombardments. There is a feeling in the population that if they were big enough to stand up to U. S. air bombings, they are big enough to run themselves a little bit. The Government is 'conscious and concerned by this.' Ho Chi Minh is old and tired. His deafness is much worse and he suffers from rheumatism and insomnia and is using opium more frequently. His public appearances are rarer but during his lucid moments he conducts long working sessions. Currently there are

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two major factions within NVN. The principal figures in these factions are:

Faction I

- (1) Le Duan
- (2) Pham Van Dong
- (3) Vo Nguyen Giap
- (4) Pham Hung
- (5) Xuan Thuy

Faction II

- (1) Trung Chinh
- (2) Nguyen Duy Trinh
- (3) Le Thanh Nghi
- (4) Le Duc Tho
- (5) Hoang Van Hoai

"Faction I feels they are pragmatists and their analysis of the situation is following. Negotiations are dragging. The international situation has evolved but they feel it is necessary to strike hard and violent blows in order to win both war and peace. They do not believe that an attempt should be made to exasperate population and butt in to black market and barter. They are prepared to tolerate at least for time being what they cannot repress. Faction II is hard line faction which believes in 'tightening screws' and applying Marxist orthodoxy and discipline. Its leader Trung Chinh handled the Agrarian reform. He has been a member of Chinese Communist Party and is former Secretary General. His relations with Giap are very bad. During war against French he executed a colonel who was a close friend of Giap's. Ho and Le Guan to avoid conflict had appointed Nguyen Thi Thanh who was subsequently killed in South Vietnam. Giap believes in stepping up war and attacking Saigon. Trung Chinh who admires Mao is man in favor of patience and continued guerrilla operation to weary U.S. opinion rather than direct violence. Both factions however agree on continuing pressure on U.S. public opinion through action.

"Situation in South Vietnam as seen by North Vietnamese: NVN feel their troops though very young are well trained and equipped and have good cadres, but basically in South they are regarded as almost foreigners and what is almost a breach exists between VC and North Vietnamese regulars. Population will denounce presence of NVN and will not help except under threat of death. U.S. activities have somewhat isolated VC from NV command and coordination is poor. Surprise is difficult and transmission of orders to lower echelon is not satisfactory. To remedy this 'dramatic situation' NVN sent South influential Minister of Health Pham Ngoc Thanh who was recently killed in South Vietnam. Following his death and to bolster up Southerners DRVN Government sent South Vice Premier Pham Hung. He is a Southerner and according to this information he

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is presently in South Vietnam. He is a protege of Pham Van Dong and is the top Southerner in DRVN structure. He moves in and out of Cambodia a good deal.

"U. S. activities that bother NVN and VC: U. S. bases well dug in; anti-rocket batteries more effective and U. S. artillery less vulnerable; localized massive use of B52's has been very costly. Transplantation of population and hunting out VC cadres aggravated VC situation. Most heavy blow was recent arrest of Huong Minh Chinh who was important figure and they believe has confessed and betrayed secrets to U. S. and GVN. Both factions divided on tactics in light of population weariness and no progress in negotiations. Americans seem in less of hurry for peace than they expected. Every effort will be made to plant in Western press theme that 'President Nixon is a hawk despite generous offers DRVN and Front have made.'

"International Situation: As these Vietnamese see it, difficulties between Sovs and Chicom real. Mao has succeeded against intellectuals and Westerners by using army. But in China army is traditionally divided and cannot hold power indefinitely. Unity can be maintained only under external pressure hence Ussuri crisis. In case of aggravation of situation from point of view of DRVN they would use Laos to retaliate. They admit to 40,000 troops in Thakkek and Savannakhet and they could send these into valleys and 'shatter Lao Government.' This would put U. S. in difficult situation re extension of war. U. S. could react in labyrinth of jungle only by air action and this would arouse world opinion and solidify Socialist Bloc. If compelled to such action it would also be coordinated with North Koreans despite fact that both Soviets and Chicoms somewhat fearful of erratic actions of Kim Il Sung who, deeply shocked by what happened in Indonesia to his friend Sukarno and fearful of strengthening in Asia of Indonesia, South Korea and South Vietnam, has interest in aggravating situation.

"Darcourt stated that he picked up during evening fact that there is acute conflict between Mai Van Bo and Xuan Thuy. Each is reporting unfavorably to Hanoi on the other. Mai Van Bo spent two years in China and represents pro-Chinese element. He sees Chinese regularly and Xuan Thuy complained to Hanoi that he was passing information re negotiations to Chinese. Mai Van Bo was temporarily

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not cleared for telegrams to and from Hanoi. This prohibition of Xuan Thuy's was overruled by Le Duc Tho but conflict between two men remains. Comment: Darcourt says that much of this was told to host while he was not there. Some of it Darcourt overheard in Vietnamese and some of it was told directly to him. He had specific notes written down when he came to my office and only someone with greater access than I have to general information on these subjects can accurately evaluate value of this information. In view of detail and known access of Darcourt I feel I must report foregoing. Darcourt is extremely anxious that his name be protected as source and that minimal distribution be given to this."

USDAO/Paris France
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